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An Account of Strikes in the Potteries, in the Years 1834 and 1836.

By JOHN BOYLE, Esq. Read before the Statistical Society of London, on the 16th April, 1838.

The Staffordshire Potteries—the principal seat of the Pottery-trade—comprise parts of three parishes, and extend, in their whole length from north to south, a distance of eight miles. There are included within these limits four market-towns, of which Burslem, as being the most ancient in the district, claims the first rank; but Hanley and Shelton, places immediately contiguous to each other, and forming, as it were, but one town, are the most populous.

At the census of 1831, the population of the several towns within the parish of Stoke-upon-Trent was 35,602; the population of the parish of Burslem 12,714; and that of the township of Tunstall, in Wolstanton parish, 3,673; making a total of 51,989: and, if the annual increase be estimated in the same ratio as that from 1821 to 1831, the population in 1836-7, the period of the strike, would be 61,000, all of whom were connected with the Pottery-trade.

All the processes of the manufacture are performed by manual labour, and no machinery, in the ordinary acceptance of the term, is used. Every branch in the trade is healthy, with the exception of that employed in covering the surface of the ware with glaze, or, as it is technically called, “dipping.” The regular working time, on which all calculations of wages are based, is 54 hours per week, or an average of 9 hours per day; but when goods are in great demand, the workmen are often required to make greater exertions, and the time is extended to 66 hours per week, or an average of 11 hours per day.

The Operative Potters, as a body, earn fully as good, if not better, wages than the workmen of any other staple trade in the kingdom; and full employment is afforded at suitable occupations to women and children. In a document published by the Chamber of Commerce previous to the general strike, and extensively circulated throughout the kingdom, there occurs the following remarks on the subject of the earnings of the workmen, and their accuracy has never been disputed:—

“Two or three years ago, when wages were considered low, the weekly average was from 17s. to 21s. for men, according to their skilfulness; 7s. to 9s. for women; and 3s. 6d. to 4s. 6d. for children of 14 years old. The average earnings in regular branches are now from 21s. to 28s. for men; 9s. to 12s. for women; and 4s. to 6s. for children; the labour being calculated at nine hours per day.”

The Operative Potters, in their general character, are industrious and orderly, and possess the luxuries, as well as comforts, of life to a considerable extent. For ten years previous to the strike, wages had been undergoing a progressive advance; caused in part by the operation of the Potters' Union, but more by an uninterrupted demand for goods, which left few or not any skilful hands out of regular employment. At no period since the establishment of the trade was the remuneration for labour so ample, as at the time of the general strike, in November, 1836.

The first Union of the workmen known in the Potteries, for the purpose of regulating prices, was established in 1824. In 1825, the hands at a number of manufactories struck for an advance of prices; but during the continuance of the strike the well-known commercial panic

of that year occurred, which frustrated their endeavours, and work was resumed at the same or lower prices than those previously paid. One of the expedients of the Union at this time was to commence manufacturing, and by thus making the surplus hands a source of profit, it was thought a waste of funds would be prevented, and at the same time the competition for employment would be checked.

After this Union was dissolved, those who had been at its head, or who had actively promoted it, were viewed by the masters as individuals who would on all occasions be ready to excite a spirit of disaffection among their fellow-workmen, and take every opportunity of raising the price of labour. As a consequence, such parties had difficulty in obtaining employment, and some therefore left the district, while others took to different occupations. One of the leading characters of the Union, who had subsequently changed his views on the subject, makes the following remarks in a letter published in July, 1836, previous to the late strike:—

“These simple facts will illustrate the nature of unions—their utter inefficacy—the factious spirit they cherish—the false principles on which they are founded—the materials of which they are ordinarily composed—and the ruinous effects to which they lead. We spent nearly 3 000*l.* to prop up a mere fallacious delusion! Labour fell lower than ever in 1826, in consequence of the depression of trade. Many of the men were ruined, and went in at any price. Many, before in comfort, dragged on a miserable existence on parish-pay, having offended their employers beyond forgiveness.”

No more was heard on the subject of union for a considerable period. About 1830, two delegates from the general “Trades Union” convened a public meeting, to be held in the open air, at a short distance from the Potteries. These individuals harangued in a strain of great violence; they denounced all the masters, with one exception, as oppressors of their workmen, and exhorted the Potters to form part of a General Union of the operative classes throughout the kingdom, which, according to their representation, would correct all that was amiss in the relations between master and servant, and give to the latter his proper station in society.

A short period after this occurred, and probably consequent upon it, a Union of the Potters was formed; the effects of which were soon felt by some of the smaller manufacturers, who were paying a low rate of wages.

In 1833, Mr. Owen, of New Lanark, visited the Potteries, and encouraged the spirit of union among the workmen. He took every means of advancing his principles, and some of the most active agents of the Union were considered to be his followers.

In 1834, another attempt was made at manufacturing. A manufactory was taken at Burslem, on a lease for a term of years, and seven of the workmen who had accumulated property entered into engagements for the payment of the annual rent. A capital amounting to 800*l.* was advanced from the general fund, and two of the most active members of the Union had the management. This concern struggled through an existence of 18 months; the capital was entirely lost, all parties became dissatisfied with each other, and those connected with the lease were happy at being discharged from their responsibilities on almost any terms.

At this time the demand for goods was remarkably brisk, and the workmen were fully employed. It appeared to the masters a favourable opportunity to respond to the feelings of the workmen, and to make an advance in the price of workmanship. It was thought that such a course would allay the irritation and discontent which generally prevailed towards a certain class of manufacturers. In the Potteries there has always been a great difference in the price paid to workmen for articles of the same description. Some manufacturers give a greater and others a less degree of finish to their goods, according to their standing in home or foreign trades; and it often happens that the workmen at one manufactory earn better wages than those at another where the prices are higher. It was mutually agreed between the masters and workmen that a joint committee, consisting of an equal number of each body, should meet, and determine on a minimum list of workmanship. This committee entered on its duties, and proceeded to effect the object in view; but it was soon brought to a termination by what the masters deemed a violation of faith on the part of the workmen.

The general body of one important branch of the trade refused to sanction the acts of their delegates, and when this was communicated to the committee, the masters would not proceed further in the business. In November, 1834, the end of the Potters' year, the workmen at ten manufactories in Burslem and Tunstall struck for an advance of wages. The advance demanded was an average of 35 per cent. upon the current rate. After the strike had continued for ten weeks, the manufacturers concerned in it convened a meeting of the general body of manufacturers throughout the district, and submitted for their consideration the demands of the workmen, and asked advice as to the course to be pursued.

This meeting decided that an advance to a certain extent ought to be conceded, and appointed a committee of 5 manufacturers, not connected with the pending dispute, to arrange an equitable list of prices. This arrangement was made without the concurrence of the workmen; but as a majority of the members of the committee were among the most respectable in the trade, and known to pay the highest prices for workmanship, and as no complaints were heard from their workmen, it was thought that a list which had received such sanction would be acceptable to the workmen engaged in the strike. The result, however, proved different, and the workmen rejected the revised list, and insisted on their full demands. At the next meeting of the general body of the masters the following resolution was passed:—

“That the meeting feels disappointed that the list of working prices, as revised by this committee and subsequently agreed to by the said manufacturers at Burslem and Tunstall, and by them offered to their workmen, has not been accepted by them, and been productive of an amicable settlement of their differences. That, in order to do away with every reasonable objection to the revised list of prices, and to bring about a permanent settlement of the matters in dispute, this meeting advise that the manufacturers concerned therein propose to the workmen at issue with them, that they select 6 operatives (not being interested parties) to be added to the present committee and Mr. Mayer, making 6 manufacturers and 6 workmen, which united committee shall look over the said list and make whatever alterations they shall deem proper therein.”

On this overture being made to the workmen, the Board of Manage-

ment of the Potters' Union, to whom everything was referred, passed the following resolution :—

February 9th, 1835.

" At a meeting of the Board of Management for the Board of Operative Potters' Society, it was unanimously resolved—The board, having duly considered the resolutions of the manufacturers' meeting, held at the Swan Inn, Hanley, on the 6th inst., find that, notwithstanding all its efforts to bring such meeting to acknowledge a fair principle to legislate upon, has hitherto failed in such efforts. Such being the case, our present conviction is, that it is neither our duty nor privilege to hold any further conference with them on the subject; and at the same time are perfectly satisfied that the prices required by the workmen are just and reasonable, and such as the circumstances of the manufacturers and the country at large will admit."

The whole grounds of dispute now remained in the same state as at the commencement of the strike, nor were they, to all appearances, any nearer a settlement. No farther attempts at compromise were made; but, on the 1st of March, after a stoppage of 15 weeks, the manufactories were opened, and the masters yielded to the demands of the workmen. There is on ordinary occasions a suspension of work for one week at Martinmas, therefore that time must be deducted from a calculation on the general loss.

The number of hands employed by the 10 manufacturers was at least 3,300, and the weekly amount of wages exceeded 1,900*l.* The total loss in wages alone sustained by the workmen may be estimated at 27,000*l.* To this amount must be added the loss sustained by the masters on their dormant capital, the loss to the working colliers, and to the other branches immediately dependent upon the Potters.

The workmen engaged in this contest did not receive that pecuniary aid from their brethren which such a display of fortitude appeared to deserve. In the financial report of the Potters' Union for this year, the amount charged under the head of assistance to the Burslem and Tunstall workmen is only 1,562*l.*; and if it be estimated that 300*l.* was collected from the publicans and shopkeepers in support of the cause, there still remains a loss to the workmen of 25,138*l.* The workmen effected the object for which they struck, and the masters appeared to be powerless. The immediate benefit to the workmen was very great: it extended from 30 to 35 per cent. upon the weekly amount of wages for the same quantity of manufactured goods. And if it be estimated that this advantage continued until the partial strike of September, 1836, a period of 18 months, it would appear that the pecuniary benefit to the workmen at the 10 manufactories would be 41,500*l.* at the lowest rate of calculation; and even after the loss sustained by the workmen in effecting this advance is deducted, there still appears a balance of 26,362*l.* in their favour. It must not, however, be thought that even half of this amount was received by the workmen in addition to the weekly wages they had previously received. The intemperate workmen had so much more time at their command to devote to dissipation. The indolent were better enabled to indulge their habits without diminishing their earnings: and as it was one of the professed objects of the Union to lessen the number of working hours, the best members were expected to show an example in this respect.

Elated with victory, the workmen thought that nothing could withstand their united will. The authorities of the Union assumed to be the

arbiters in everything that related to the workmen and their employers. Whenever an advance was deemed necessary it was demanded, and a few days or hours were given to the masters to express their submission or refusal. If the workmen at some manufactories did not subscribe to the funds to the full extent required, certain indispensable hands were ordered to strike until the refractory members yielded obedience. In some instances where workmen were dismissed for violations of duty, the rest struck until the others were restored to their places. It frequently happened that a master was not allowed to increase the number of hands in a certain department, on the ground that his workmen did not think an addition was required. A new form of agreement, drawn up under the sanction of the Union, was dictated to the masters; the hours of labour were to be diminished, and the number of apprentices, as well as the conditions on which they were to be taken, was regulated by the same authority. The masters found it impossible to comply with these demands, and submit to the course of conduct pursued, without appearing to abandon the general interests of the trade. The jealousy and distrust which proverbially exists among the manufacturers of this district, and which had hitherto prevented all united attempts at resistance, now began to yield.

In March, 1836, the great body of the manufacturers formed themselves into a society, under the designation of a "Chamber of Commerce," the professed object of which was to protect the general interests of the trade, and no subject so urgently claimed their attention as the proceedings of the workmen. In the succeeding month the Chamber issued an address in which it set forth, that to remain inactive any longer would be to encourage the proceedings of the Union, would destroy the control of the manufacturer over his business, and expose him to constant and progressive annoyance.

In order fully to understand all the bearings of the Potters' strike, it is necessary that an explanation should be given on one of the peculiar regulations of the trade, viz., that of annual hiring. It has been usual since the first establishment of the trade, for the workmen to be hired from Martinmas to Martinmas, and when any change was made in prices, or in the conditions of work, it was always made on these occasions. It is urged in defence of this usage, that such is the varied nature of the trade, and so many hands are immediately dependent on each other, that it would be productive of great inconvenience if masters and workmen were allowed to separate at a short notice.

The Chamber found it impossible to effect any beneficial change in the existing state of things until the period arrived when engagements had to be renewed for the following year. Although the workmen had set at naught their contracts, and had triumphantly undergone whatever punishment the law awarded, such a course could not be adopted by the masters, and nothing remained but to wait patiently until a proper period arrived to introduce new regulations. It had clearly appeared that, notwithstanding an agreement to the contrary, the workmen were enabled to effect their object, by causing the hands at any manufactory to strike until their demands were conceded. To counteract this, no other plan presented itself to the Chamber than that of inserting a clause in the agreement whereby the masters, as a body, might be enabled to

suspend their manufactories whenever the workmen of any master struck, in violation of an existing contract. Such a clause was drawn up, under the sanction of the highest legal authority, and the masters determined on its forming part of their agreement.

The contest on the part of the masters was limited to these objects—to maintain the established usages of the trade—to continue the mode of hiring from year to year—and to make an alteration in the form, by adding a protective clause of the nature now explained.

The workmen attempted to alter the system of annual hiring, and to substitute an agreement terminable at a month's notice. They decidedly objected to the protective clause of the masters, under any modification, and determined on abolishing one of the most important regulations of the trade, that of working "good from the oven."

With respect to this mode of work, it is necessary to offer a brief explanation. Two branches of the potting trade, *viz.*, Flat and Hollow ware pressers, are only paid for the work which comes in a perfect state out of the biscuit-oven, and it is assumed that whatever is imperfect, whether from accidental breakage or bad workmanship, is of no value, and is consequently broken. This custom has prevailed for upwards of thirty years, and when it was first commenced an increased price was paid to the workmen, in consideration of the risk incurred by the work undergoing this process. It is urged by the masters, in defence of this usage, that it affords the only feasible check upon the unskilfulness of their workmen; that the loss to the good workman is inconsiderable, and only falls heavily upon the negligent or bad workman: while, under any circumstances, the loss to the master is the greatest, inasmuch as he loses the material and the firing from no fault of his own; while the workman, by whose unskilfulness the loss is occasioned, only loses the price of his labour.

The Potters' Union represented the many abuses that had grown up under the mode of working "good from the oven," and their objections were in part admitted by the masters; but previous to the termination of the strike the system was divested of whatever was objectionable, as far as that could be done with security to the interests of the trade at large.

A certain period of time is always allowed between the termination of an existing engagement and its renewal. This regulation is mutually advantageous; it enables changes to be made either by masters or workmen, without inconvenience to the one, or loss of time to the other. The Chamber fixed the 5th of September as the period when engagements were to be entered into for the following year, which would, as a matter of course, commence on the 11th of November, or Martinmas. The masters expressed their readiness to proceed to the annual hiring, based on the new form of agreement, but those terms were universally rejected. The workmen thought, however, that if the old mode of enforcing their demands were then adopted, the same result would follow, and the hands at 14 manufactories struck work, although they were under agreement to the end of the year. The Chamber of Commerce took the case of these 14 manufacturers into their consideration, and urged them to oppose the proceedings of their workmen. Pecuniary recompense was promised, on a scale proportionate to the

relative extent of their business, until Martinmas, the time when the suspension of the whole body would offer a more formidable resistance. The workmen, week after week, deceived themselves with the hope that the masters would not continue united; that certain individuals among those whose men had struck would soon yield, rather than sacrifice their connections; and that the secession of one would be the signal for the surrender of all the others. No change was made in this state of things until Martinmas, when 64 manufacturers, members of the Chamber, suspended business, as they had previously resolved. Certain masters, inconsiderable in extent of business, yielded, rather than make the sacrifice of suspension; but those who held together, proved sufficient to make an effectual resistance.

The number of hands employed at the 14 manufactories which struck in September, was 3,500, and the weekly payment of wages was, at an average, 2,560*l.* The total loss to the district on this strike may be estimated at 31,168*l.*

The number of hands employed at the 64 manufactories engaged in the general strike was 15,660, and the amount of wages was at an average 11,238*l.* per week. The loss to the whole district on this strike, may be estimated at 157,442*l.* There are in the Potteries 130 manufactories, which employ 20,100 hands, and pay in wages weekly 14,400*l.* It would thus appear that about half the total number of manufacturers were engaged in the strike, but as they were the greatest in extent of business they employed $\frac{2}{3}$ ths of the total number of hands, and paid $\frac{2}{3}$ ths of the whole amount of wages.

On the 28th of January 1837, 21 weeks from the commencement of the strike with the 14 manufactories, and 10 weeks from the general suspension, the men resumed work. The Union did not succeed in any of its objects. The annual hiring was retained, the suspension clause formed part of the agreement, and the "good from oven" system was continued. The extent of suffering was very great, and far beyond anything that had previously been seen in the district. The payments from the Union funds were very irregular, and did not exceed an average of 5*s.* or 6*s.* per week for men with families; while women and children, who form a large proportion of the working population, did not receive any allowance. Every form of appeal was made to the operative classes throughout the whole of the United Kingdom, and the extent to which assistance was afforded may be gathered from the fact that, there is at present owing to the Trades' Unions of other towns, the sum of 3,275*l.*, and of this amount there is due to Sheffield alone, 2,084*l.*

The constancy with which privations and distress were endured might call forth admiration, if the object to be attained had been less questionable in policy, or the means employed more justifiable. A few days before the termination of the strike, and at the very period when a great body of the workmen had entered into engagements with the masters, and thus virtually abandoned the Union, a considerable number of individuals, amounting, it is said, to upwards of 200, simultaneously pledged their watches and disposable articles of dress, in aid of the general funds. Many of the more provident workmen who had money in the Savings' Bank of the district, drew it out, either for the supply of

their own necessities, or to assist the Union. Several Friendly Societies, whose members were connected with the strike, advanced on loan the whole or a great portion of their accumulated funds. In many instances the workmen who had been enabled from their savings to build or purchase cottages for themselves, surrendered their deeds in security for the advances of distant Unions. The amount due by the potters to members of their own body for loans advanced or claims withheld is 2,563*l.*, and when to this is added the sum of 3,275*l.*, owing to distant Unions, the total amount of debts to be discharged is 5,838*l.*

No outrage was committed during the strike, either on the person or property of any manufacturer. There were no tumultuous assemblages, nor indications of violence; and, in these respects, due credit must be given to the operative potters. For some time during the strike, if not throughout, many of the manufactories were "picketed," and any individual seen to enter incurred a fine, which was stopped from the succeeding week's allowance. Such a regulation may be necessary in support of a bad cause, but can scarcely be required in one founded on justice. It represses the influence of kindly feeling between the master and workman, and prevents any approach to settlement, excepting through some of the official members of the Union, between whom and the masters there is usually a feeling of bitterness and resentment; and it is certainly a matter for surprise, that men who from their public addresses, appear to understand so well their rights, and who are so sensitive under what is deemed oppression, should submit thus to be controlled in the operation of their own free will and liberty of action.

Financial Statement.

Strike at 14 manufactories, from September 5th to November 14th, 1836, a period of ten weeks. Number of hands employed, 3,500, including men, women, and children of both sexes. Amount paid in wages per week, 2,560*l.*

	£
Loss sustained in wages for ten weeks, at 2,560 <i>l.</i> per week	25,609
„ „ by 45 Crate-makers, earning 22 <i>s.</i> }	495
per week }	
„ „ by 270 Colliers, earning 21 <i>s.</i> }	2,835
per week }	
„ on rental of 14 manufactories, according to valuation in the parochial surveys }	656
„ on interest of capital employed by the 14 manufacturers, estimated at 165,000 <i>l.</i> , at 5 per cent. per annum }	1,582
	———— £31,168

Strike at 64 manufactories, from November 21st, 1836, to January 30th, 1837, a period of ten weeks. Number of hands employed, 15,660, including men, women, and children of both sexes. Amount paid in wages per week, 11,238*l.*

		£
Brought forward		31,168
	£	
Loss sustained in wages for ten weeks, at 11,238 <i>l.</i> per week	112,380	
„ „ by 200 Crate-makers, earning 22 <i>s.</i> per week	2,200	
„ „ by 185 Engravers, unemployed three days per week, whose average earnings were 26 <i>s.</i> per week	1,202	
„ sustained in wages by 1,200 Colliers, earning 21 <i>s.</i> per week	12,600	
„ on rental of 64 manufactories, according to valuation in the parochial surveys	2,881	
„ on rental of 31 steam-mills, employing 850 horse power, according to valuation in the parochial surveys	1,020	
„ on interest of capital employed by the 64 manufacturers, estimated at 720,000 <i>l.</i> , at 5 per cent. per annum	6,940	
Expenditure of Chamber of Commerce in mutual assistance, Payments to Secretaries, &c.	3,383	
Expenditure of Potters' Union, according to their own published statement	14,836	
		<u>157,442</u>
Total loss incurred on the two strikes		<u>£188,610</u>
Total loss to the Operative Potters	152,816	
„ to Colliers, Crate-makers, and Engravers	19,332	
„ to the Manufacturers	16,462	
		<u>£188,610</u>

CENTRAL SOCIETY OF EDUCATION.

Second Publication, Lond., 1838.

ONE of the distinguishing characteristics of the present era in this country is the increasing desire which exists on the part of the higher classes of society to improve the condition and to raise the character of the poor and labouring classes. The legislature is occupied in discovering and removing the errors and defects which a faulty constitution or the progress of time has introduced into the operation of the laws. Benevolent individuals are uniting in numerous societies for the purpose of enquiring accurately into the state of the poor; of searching out the true character of their wants; of considering and discussing the best method of supplying those wants; and, lastly, of pointing out and endeavouring to remove the obstacles which at present hinder national improvement. Such, for instance, are the various Statistical Societies, and the Central Society of Education, for purposes of enquiry; the Labourers' Friend Society, the Children's Friend Society, the Small Loan Fund, and the Friendly Loan Societies, with many others, to which men of opulence have given their time and money, for the purpose of improving